THE BELIEVER'S COMFORT

EXCERPTED FROM

THE SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST

by

RICHARD BAXTER

selected, edited, modernised, and with Bible references added

by

PHILIP DE VERE

for
Oliver Medhurst
waiting patiently on the coming of his Lord

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Archaic forms of language and syntax have been modernised, and words whose meaning has changed substituted, while the quotations from the Authorised Version of the Bible in English have been left unaltered. This adaptation has been effected in the sincere belief that increased accessibility to modern readers is what Baxter himself would have desired for his work. For the sake of clarity within sustained or complicated sentences, pronouns relating to God the Father have been capitalised, while those referring to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have not. A contrariness to Baxter's own Trinitarian orthodoxy is not thereby intended.

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"There remaineth therefore a rest unto the people of God." Hebrews *4:9*

1. AN ACCOUNT OF THE NATURE OF THE SAINTS' REST

It was not only our interest in God, and actual enjoyment of him, which was lost in Adam's fall (*Genesis* 3), but all spiritual knowledge of Him, and true disposition towards such a bliss. When the Son of God comes with recovering grace, and disclosures of a spiritual and eternal happiness and glory, he finds not faith in man to believe it. As the poor man, that would not believe any one had such a sum as a million pounds, it was so far above what he himself possessed, so men will hardly now believe there is such a happiness as once they had, much less as Christ has now procured. When God would give the Israelites His Sabbaths of rest, in a land of rest, it was harder to make them believe it, than to overcome their enemies, and procure it for them. And when they had it, only as a small intimation and earnest of an incomparably more glorious rest through Christ, they yet believed no more than they possessed, but said, with the epicurean at the feast, "Surely there is no other heaven but this!" or, if they expected more by the Messiah, it was only the increase of their earthly bliss.

The apostle aims most of the Epistle to the Hebrews against this hard-heartedness, and clearly and expansively proves that the end of all ceremonies and shadows is to direct them to Jesus Christ, the substance; and that the rest of Sabbaths, and the Promised Land, should teach them to look for a further rest, which is in fact their happiness. My text (*Hebrews* 4:9) is his conclusion after various arguments; a conclusion which contains the ground of all the believer's comfort, the end of all his duty and sufferings, the life and sum of all gospel promises and Christian privileges. What more welcome to men under personal afflictions, tiring duties, disappointments, or sufferings, than rest? It is not our comfort only, but our stability. Our liveliness in all duties, our enduring of tribulation, our honouring of God, the vigour of our love, thankfulness, and all our graces; yes indeed, the very being of our religion and Christianity depend on the believing, serious thoughts of our rest. And now, reader, whoever you are, young or old, rich or poor, I entreat you, and charge you, in the name of your Lord, Who will shortly call you to a reckoning, and judge you as to your everlasting, unchangeable state, that you give these things not the reading only, and so dismiss them with a bare approbation, but that you set upon this work, and take God in Christ for your only rest, and fix your heart upon Him above all. May the living God, Who is the portion and rest of His saints, make these our carnal minds so spiritual, and our earthly hearts so heavenly, that loving Him, and delighting in Him may be the work of our lives; and that neither I that write, nor you that read this book, may ever be turned from this path of life; lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, we should come short of it through our own unbelief or negligence.

The saints' rest is the most happy state of a Christian; or, it is the perfect endless enjoyment of God by the perfected saints, according to the measure of their capacity, to which their souls arrive at death, and both soul and body most fully after the resurrection and final judgment.

There are some things necessarily presupposed in the nature of this rest:–

– That mortal men are the persons seeking it. For angels and glorified spirits have it already, and the devils and damned are past hope;

– That they choose God only for their end and happiness. He that takes any thing else for his happiness is out of the way the first step;

– That they are distant from this end. This is the woeful case of all mankind since the fall. When Christ comes with regenerating grace, he finds no man sitting still, but all galloping to eternal ruin, and making haste toward hell; till, by conviction, he first brings them to a standstill, and then, by conversion, turns their hearts and lives sincerely to himself.

– This end, and its excellence, is supposed to be known, and seriously intended. An unknown good does not move to desire or endeavour. And not only a distance from this rest, but the true knowledge of this distance is also supposed. They that never yet knew they were without God, and in the way to hell, never yet knew the way to heaven. Can a man find he has lost his God and his soul, and not cry, “I am undone”? The reason why so few obtain this rest, is, they will not be convinced that they are, in point of title, distant from it and, in point of practice, contrary to it. Who ever sought for that which he knew not he had lost? "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:" (*Matthew* 9:12)

– The influence of a superior moving Cause is also supposed; else we shall all stand still, and not move toward our rest. If God move us not, we cannot move. It is a most necessary part of our Christian wisdom, to keep our subordination to God, and dependence on Him. “We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.” (*2 Corinthians* 3:5) "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing." (*John* 15:5)

– It is next supposed, that they who seek this rest have an inward principle of spiritual life. God does not move men like stones, but He endows them with life, not to enable them to move without Him, but in subordination to Himself, The First Mover.

– And further, this rest supposes such an actual tendency of soul toward it as is regular and constant, earnest and hard-working. He that hides his talent shall receive the wages of a slothful servant (*Matthew* 25:25-28). Christ is the door, the only way to this rest. "But strait is the gate and narrow is the way," and we must strive, if we will enter; for "many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able," (*Matthew* 7:14) which implies, "that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence." (*Matthew* 11:12) Nor will it bring us to the end of the saints, if we begin in the spirit and end in the flesh. He only "that endureth to the end shall be saved." (*Matthew* 24:13) And never did a soul obtain rest with God whose desire was not set upon Him above all things else in the world. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart he also." (*Matthew* 6:21) The remainder of our old nature will much weaken and interrupt these desires, but never overcome them. And, considering the opposition to our desires, from the contrary principles in our nature, and from the weakness of our graces, together with our continued distance from the end, our self-direction to that end must be strenuous, and with all our might.

– All these things are presupposed, in order to a Christian's obtaining an interest in heavenly rest.

Now we have ascended these steps into the outward court, may we look within the veil? (*Exodus* 26:3; *2 Chronicles* 3:14; *Hebrews* 6:19) May we show what this rest contains, as well as what it presupposes? Alas! how little I know of that glory! The glimpse which Paul had, contained what could not, or must not, be uttered (*2 Corinthians* 12:4). Had he spoken the things of heaven in the language of heaven, and none understood that language, what would have been the better? The Lord reveal to me what I may reveal to you! The Lord open some light, and show both you and me our inheritance! Not as to Balaam only, whose eyes were opened to see the goodliness of Jacob's tents, and Israel's tabernacles, where he had no portion, and from whence must come his own destruction (*Numbers* 24:5); not as to Moses, who had only a disclosure instead of possession, and saw the land which he never entered (*Deuteronomy* 34:4); but as the pearl was revealed to the merchant in the Gospel, who rested not till he had sold all he had, and bought it (*Matthew* 13:45-46), and as heaven was opened to blessed Stephen, which he was shortly to enter, and the glory showed him which should be his own possession (*Acts* 7:55). The things contained in heavenly rest are such as these: a ceasing from means of grace; a perfect freedom from all evils; the highest degree of the saints' personal perfection, both of body and soul; and the nearest enjoyment of God, The Chief Good and a sweet and constant action of all the powers of body and soul in this enjoyment of God.

1. One thing contained in heavenly rest, is, ***the ceasing from means of grace***. When we have obtained the haven, we have done sailing. When the workman receives his wages, it is implied he has done his work. When we are at our journey's end, we have done with the way. Whether prophecies, they shall fail; whether tongues, they shall cease; whether knowledge, it also, so far as it had the nature of means, shall vanish away (*1 Corinthians* 13:8). There shall be no more prayer, because no more necessity, but the full enjoyment of what we prayed for: neither shall we need to fast, and weep, and watch any more, being out of the reach of sin and temptations. Preaching is done; the ministry of man ceases; ordinances become useless; the labourers are called in, because the harvest is gathered, the tares burned, and the work finished (*Matthew* 13:40) – the unregenerate past hope, and the saints past fear, for ever.

2. There is in heavenly rest ***a perfect freedom from all evils*** – all the evils that accompanied us through our course, and which necessarily follow our absence from The Chief Good, besides our freedom from those eternal flames and restless miseries which the neglecters of Christ and grace must for ever endure; a woeful inheritance, which, both by birth and actual merit, was due to us as well as to them! In heaven there is nothing that defiles or is unclean. All such things remain outside. And doubtless there is not such a thing as grief and sorrow known there; nor is there such a thing as a pale face, a languid body, feeble joints, helpless infancy, decrepit age, depression, painful or pining sickness, griping fears, consuming cares, nor whatsoever deserves the name of evil. We wept and lamented when the world rejoiced, but our sorrow will be turned to joy, and our joy shall no man take from us.

3. Another ingredient of this rest is: ***the highest degree of the saints' personal perfection, both of body and soul***. Were the glory ever so great, and themselves not made capable of it by a personal perfection suitable to it, it would be little to them. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (*1 Corinthians* 2:9; *Isaiah* 64:4) For the eye of flesh is not capable of seeing these things, nor this ear of hearing them, nor this heart of understanding them, but there the eye and ear and heart are made capable – else, how do they enjoy them? The more perfect the sight is, the more delightful the beautiful object. The more perfect the appetite, the sweeter the food. The more musical the ear, the more pleasant the melody. The more perfect the soul, the more joyous those joys, and the more glorious, to us, is that glory.

4. The principal part of this rest is ***our nearest enjoyment of God, The Chief Good***. And here, reader, wonder not if I be at a loss, and if my apprehensions receive but little of that which is in my expressions. If it did not appear to the beloved disciple what we shall be, but only, in general, "that when Christ shall appear we shall be like him," (*1 John* 3:2) no wonder if I know little. When I know so little of God, I cannot much know what it is to enjoy Him. If I know so little of spirits, how little of The Father of Spirits, or the state of my own soul, when advanced to the enjoyment of Him! I stand and look upon a heap of ants, and see them all at one view: they know not me, my being, nature, or thoughts, though I am their fellow-creature: how little then, must we know of the great Creator, though He, with one view, clearly beholds us all! A glimpse, the saints behold – as in a clouded mirror (*1 Corinthians* 13:12), which makes us capable of some poor, dark apprehensions of what we shall behold in glory. If I should tell a worldling what the holiness and spiritual joys of the saints on earth are, he cannot know; for grace cannot be clearly known without grace; how much less could he conceive it, should I tell him of this glory! But to the saints I may be somewhat more encouraged to speak, for grace gives them a dark knowledge and slight taste of glory. If men and angels should study to speak the blessedness of that state in one word, what could they say beyond this, that it is the nearest enjoyment of God? O the full joys offered to a believer in that one sentence of Christ, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me!" (*John* 17:24) Every word is full of life and joy. If the queen of Sheba had cause to say of Solomon's glory, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom;" (*1 Kings* 10:8) then, surely, they that stand continually before God, and see His glory, and the glory of the Lamb, are more than happy. To them will Christ give to eat of the tree of life (*Revelation* 2:7), and to eat of the hidden manna (*Revelation* 2:17); yes indeed, he will make them pillars in the temple of God (*Revelation* 3:12), and they shall go no more out; and he will write upon them the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, which is New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from his God, and he will write upon them his new name (*Revelation* 3:12); yes, more, if more may be, he will grant them to sit with him in his throne. "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (*Revelation* 7:14-15, 17)

O blind, deceived world! Can you show us such a glory? This is the city of our God, where the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God (*Revelation* 21:3). The glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb is the light of it (*Revelation* 21:23). And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and his name shall be in their foreheads (*Revelation* 22:4). These sayings are faithful and true, and the things which must shortly be done (*Revelation* 22:6). And now we say, as Mephibosheth, let the world take all, forasmuch as our Lord will come in peace (*2 Samuel* 19:30). Rejoice, therefore, in the Lord, O you righteous, and say, with His servant David, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance: the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (*Psalm* 16:5-11) What presumption would it have been, once, to have thought or spoken of such a thing, if God had not spoken it before us! I dared not have thought of the saints' preferment in this life, as Scripture sets it forth, had it not been the express truth of God. How unbecoming to talk of being sons of God – speaking to Him – having fellowship with Him – dwelling in Him and He in us – if this had not been God's own language! How much less dared we have once thought of shining forth as the sun (*1 Corinthians* 15:41) – of being joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17) – of judging the world (*1 Corinthians* 6:2) – of sitting on Christ's throne (*Revelation* 3:21) – of being one in him and the Father (*John* 17:21) – if we had not all this from the mouth, and under the hand of God! But has He said, and shall He not do it? Has He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Yes, as the Lord God is true, thus shall it be done to the man whom Christ delights to honour.

Be of good cheer, Christian; the time is at hand when God and you shall be near, and as near as you can well desire. You shall dwell in His family. Is that enough? It is better to be a door-keeper in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness (*Psalm* 84:10). You shall ever stand before Him, about His throne, in the room with Him, in His presence-chamber. Would you yet be nearer? You shall be His child, and He your Father; you shall be an heir of His kingdom (*Romans* 8:17); yes, more: the spouse of His Son. And what more can you desire? You shall be a member of the body of His Son (*Ephesians* 4:4); He shall be your head; you shall be one with him, who is one with the Father, as he himself has desired for you of his Father: "that they all may be one, as Thou, Father,

art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; and the glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me." (*John* 17:21-23)

5. We must add, that ***this rest contains a sweet and constant action of all the powers of the soul and body in this enjoyment of God***. It is not the rest of a stone, which ceases from all motion when it attains the centre. This body shall be so changed, that it shall no more be flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom of God; but a spiritual body. We sow not that body which shall be, but God gives it a body as it has pleased Him, and to every seed his own body. If grace makes a Christian differ so much from what he was, as to say, "I am not the man I was," how much more will glory make us differ! As much as a body spiritual, above the sun in glory, exceeds these frail, obnoxious, diseased bodies of flesh, so far shall our senses exceed those we now possess. Doubtless, as God advances our senses, and enlarges our capacity, so will He advance the happiness of those senses, and fill up, with Himself, all that capacity. Certainly the body would not be raised up and continued, if it were not to share in the glory. As it has shared in the obedience and sufferings, so shall it also in the blessedness. As Christ bought the whole man, so shall the whole partake of the everlasting benefits of the purchase. O blessed occupation of a glorified body: to stand before the throne of God and the Lamb, and to sound forth for ever, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for thou hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests. Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (*Revelation* 5:9,12; 19:1,6)

O Christians, this is the blessed rest; a rest, as it were, without rest; for "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come." (*Revelation* 4:8) And if the body shall be thus occupied, O how shall the soul be taken up! As its powers and capacities are greatest, so its actions are strongest, and its enjoyments sweetest. As the bodily senses have their proper actions, whereby they receive and enjoy their objects, so does the soul in its own actions enjoy its own objects, by knowing, remembering, loving, and delightful rejoicing. This is the soul's enjoyment. By these eyes it sees, and by these arms it embraces.

Knowledge, of itself, is very desirable. As far as the reasoning soul exceeds the sensing, so far the delights of a philosopher, in discovering the secrets of nature, and knowing the mystery of sciences, exceed the delights of the drunkard, the voluptuary, or the sensualist. So excellent is all truth. What, then, is their delight who know The God of Truth! How noble a faculty of the soul is the understanding! It can encompass the earth; it can measure the sun, moon, stars, and heaven; it can foreknow each eclipse to a minute, many years before. But this is the top of all its excellence: that it can know God, Who is infinite, Who made all these – a little here, and more, much more, hereafter. O the wisdom and goodness of our blessed Lord! He has created the understanding with a natural bias and inclination to truth as its object; and to The Prime Truth as its prime object. Christian: when, after long gazing heavenward, you have got a glimpse of Christ, do you not sometimes seem to have been with Paul in the third heaven, whether in the body or out, and to have seen what is unutterable (*2 Corinthians* 12:2)? Are you not, with Peter, ready to say, "Master, it is good to be here" (*Luke* 9:33) "O that I might dwell in this mount! O that I might ever see what I now see"? Did you never look so long upon the Sun of Righteousness (*Malachi* 4:2) till your eyes were dazzled with His astonishing glory? And did not the splendour of it make all things below seem dark and drear to you? Especially in the day of suffering for Christ, when he usually appears most manifestly to his people, did you never see one walking in the midst of the fiery furnace with you, like the Son of God (*Daniel* 3:25)? Believe me, Christians, yes, believe God: you that have known most of God in Christ here, it is as nothing to what you shall know; in comparison of that, it scarce deserves to be called “knowledge.” For as these bodies, so that knowledge must cease, that a more perfect may succeed. "Knowledge shall vanish away. For we know in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know, even as also I am known." (*1 Corinthians* 13:8-12) Marvel not therefore, Christian, how it can be life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ. To enjoy God and Christ is eternal life, and the soul's enjoying is in knowing. They that savour only of earth, and consult with flesh, think it a poor happiness to know God. But we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness; and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (*John* 17:3)

The ***memory*** will not be idle, or useless, in this blessed work. From that height the saint can look behind him and before him. And to compare past

with present things must raise in the blessed soul an inconceivable esteem and sense of its condition. To stand on that mount, whence we can see the Wilderness and Canaan both at once (*Deuteronomy* 32:49); to stand in heaven and look back on earth, and weigh them together in the balance of a comparing sense and judgment, how must it needs transport the soul, and make it cry out, "Is this the purchase that cost so dear as the blood of Christ? No wonder! O blessed price and thrice blessed love, that found and condescended! Is this the end of believing? Is this the end of the Spirit's workings? Have the gales of grace blown me into such a harbour? Is it hither that Christ has drawn my soul? O blessed way, and thrice blessed end! Is this the glory which the Scriptures spoke of, and ministers preached of so much? I see the Gospel is indeed good tidings, even tidings of peace and good things, tidings of great joy to all nations! (*Isaiah* 52:7; *Romans* 10:15; *Luke* 2:10) Is my mourning, my fasting, my sad humiliations, my heavy walking, come to this? Is my praying, watching, fearing to offend, come to this? Are all my afflictions, Satan's temptations, the world's scorns and jeers, come to this? O vile nature, that resisted so much, and so long, such a blessing! Unworthy soul! Is this the place you came to so unwillingly? Was duty wearisome? Was the world too good to lose? Could you not leave all, deny all, and suffer any thing for this? Were you loath to die, to come to this? O false heart, you had almost betrayed me to eternal flames, and lost me this glory! Are you not now ashamed, my soul, that ever you questioned that love which brought you hither, that you were jealous of the faithfulness of your Lord, that you suspected His love, when you should only have suspected yourself, that ever you quenched a motion of His Spirit, and that you should misinterpret those providences, and repine at those ways which have such an end? Now you are sufficiently convinced that your blessed Redeemer was saving you as well when He crossed your desires, as when He granted them; when He broke your heart, as when He bound it up. No thanks to you, unworthy self, for this received crown; but to Jehovah and the Lamb be glory for ever."

But, O! – the full, the near, the sweet enjoyment, is that of ***love***. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (*1 John* 3:23-24; 4:8) Now the poor soul complains, "O that I could love Christ more!" Then you can not but love him. Now, you know little of his lovability, and therefore love little: then, your eyes will affect your heart, and the continual viewing of that perfect beauty will keep you in continual transports of love. Christians, does it not now stir up your love, to remember all the experiences of His love? Does not kindness melt you, and the sunshine of Divine goodness warm your frozen hearts? What will it do then, when you shall live in love, and have all in Him, Who is all? Surely love is both work and wages. What a high favour, that God will give us leave to love Him – that He will be embraced by those who have

embraced lust and sin before Him! But more than this: He returns love for love; nay, a thousand times more. Christian, you will be then brim-full of love, yet, love as much as you can, you shall be ten thousand times more beloved. Were the arms of the Son of God open upon the cross, and an open passage made to his heart by the spear (*John* 19:34), and will not his arms and heart be open to you in glory? Did not he begin to love before you loved, and will not he continue now? Did he love you, an enemy? – you, a sinner? – you, who even loathed yourself? – and acknowledge you, when you disclaimed yourself? And will he not now immeasurably love you, a son? – you, a perfect saint? – you, who return some love for love? He that in love wept over the old Jerusalem when near its ruin (*Luke* 19:41), with what love will he rejoice over the New Jerusalem in her glory! Christian, believe this, and think on it: you shall be eternally embraced in the arms of that love which was from everlasting and will extend to everlasting; of that love which brought the Son of God's love from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to glory; that love which was weary, hungry, tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spat upon, crucified, pierced; which fasted, prayed, taught, healed, wept, sweated, bled, died; that love will eternally embrace you. When perfect created love and most perfect uncreated love meet together, it will not be like Joseph and his brethren, who lay upon one another's necks weeping (*Genesis* 49:14-15); it will be loving and rejoicing, not loving and sorrowing. Yes, it will make Satan's court ring with the news that Joseph's brethren have come, that the saints have arrived safe at the bosom of Christ, out of the reach of hell for ever. Nor is there any such love as David's and Jonathan's, breathing out its last into sad lamentations for a forced separation (*1 Samuel* 20:41; *2 Samuel* 1:12). Know this, believer, to your everlasting comfort: if those arms have once embraced you, neither sin nor hell can get you from there – for ever. You have not to deal with an inconstant creature, but with Him with Whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning (*James* 1:17). His love to you will not be as yours was on earth to Him, seldom and cold, up and down. He that would not cease nor abate His love, for all your enmity, unkind neglects, and churlish resistances, can He cease to love you, when He has made you truly lovely? He Who keeps you so constant in your love to Him, that you can challenge tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword, to separate your love from Christ, how much more will He himself be constant! Indeed you may be "persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (*Romans* 8:38-39) And now, are we not left in the apostle's wonderment? What shall we say to these things? Infinite love must needs be a mystery to a finite capacity – no wonder angels desire to look into this mystery (*1 Peter* 1:12). And if it be the study of saints here "to know

the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;" the saints' everlasting rest must consist in the enjoyment of God by love.

Nor does ***joy*** share least in this fruition. It is this which all we have mentioned lead to, and conclude in: even the inconceivable contentment which the blessed feel in seeing, knowing, loving, and being beloved of God. This is "the white stone which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." (*Revelation* 2:17) Surely this is the joy which a stranger does not interfere with. All Christ's ways of mercy tend to and end in the saints' joys. He wept, sorrowed, suffered, that they might rejoice; he sends the Spirit to be their comforter (*John* 14:16-17); he multiplies promises; he reveals their future happiness, that their joy may be full. He opens to them the fountain of living waters, that they may thirst no more, and that it may spring up in them to everlasting life (*John* 4:14). He chastens them that he may give them rest. He makes it their duty to rejoice in him always, and again commands them to rejoice. He never brings them into so low a condition that he does not leave them more cause of joy than sorrow. And hath the Lord such a care of our comfort here? O what will that joy be, where the soul being perfectly prepared for joy, and joy prepared by Christ for the soul, it shall be our work, our business, eternally to rejoice! It seems the saints' joy shall be greater than the damned's torment, for their torment is the torment of creatures, prepared for the devil and his angels (*Matthew* 25:41; *Revelation* 20:10), but our joy is the joy of our Lord. The same glory which the Father gave the Son, the Son hath given them – to sit with him in his throne, even as he is set down with his Father in His throne. You, poor soul, who prays for joy, waits for joy, complains for want of joy, longs for joy, you then shall have full joy, as much as you can hold, and more than ever you thought on, or your heart desired. In the meantime walk carefully, watch constantly, and then let God measure out to you your times and degrees of joy. It may be He keeps them until you have more need. You had better lose your comfort than your safety. If you should die full of fears and sorrows, it will be but a moment, and they are all gone and concluded in joy inconceivable. As the joy of the hypocrite, so the fears of the upright are but for a moment. God's "anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (*Psalm* 30:5) O blessed morning! Poor, humble, drooping soul, how would it fill you with joy now, if a voice from heaven should tell you of the love of God, the pardon of your sins, and assure you of your part in these joys! What then will your joy be! Then your actual possession shall convince you of your title, and you shall be in heaven before you are well aware!

And it is not your joy only: it is a ***mutual joy*** as well as a mutual love. Is there joy in heaven at your conversion, and will there be none at your

glorification? (*Luke* 15:10) Will not the angels welcome you there, and congratulate your safe arrival? – Yes indeed, it is the joy of Jesus Christ; for now he has the end of his undertaking, labour, suffering, dying, when we have our joys; when he is glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe; when he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. This is Christ's harvest, when he shall reap the fruit of his labours (*Revelation* 14:4-6); and he will not regret his sufferings, but he rejoices over his purchased inheritance, and his people will rejoice in him. – Yes, the Father Himself puts on joy, too, in our joy. As we grieve His Spirit, and weary him with our iniquities, so He is rejoiced in our good. O how quickly does He now espy a returning prodigal, even afar off! How does He run and meet him! And with what compassion does He fall on his neck and kiss him, and put on him the best robe, and a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and kills the fatted calf, to eat and be merry (*Luke* 15:20,22-23)! This is indeed a happy meeting; but nothing to the embracing and joy of that last and great meeting. – Yes, more: as God mutually loves and rejoices, so He makes this His rest, as it is our rest. What an eternal Sabbath, when the work of redemption, sanctification, preservation, glorification, is all finished and perfected for ever! "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." (*Zephaniah* 3:17) Well may we then rejoice in our God with joy, and rest in our love, and joy in Him with singing.

Alas! my fearful heart scarce dares proceed. Methinks I hear the Almighty's voice saying to me, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (*Job* 42:3) But pardon Your servant, O Lord. I have not pried into unrevealed things. I bewail that my apprehensions are so dull, my thoughts so mean, my affections so stupid, and my expressions so low and unbecoming such a glory. I have only heard by the hearing of the ear (*Job* 42:5). O let Your servant see You, and possess these joys; then shall I have more suitable conceptions, and will give You fuller glory; I shall abhor my present self, and disclaim and renounce all these imperfections. "I have uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." (*Job* 42:3) Yet "I believed, and therefore have I spoken." (*Romans* 4:13; *Psalm* 116:10) What, Lord, can You expect from dust, but levity? Or from corruption, but defilement? Though the weakness and irreverence be the fruit of my own corruption, yet the fire is from Your altar (*Isaiah* 6:6), and the work of Your commanding. I looked not into Thine ark, nor put forth my hand unto it without You (*2 Samuel* 6:6). Wash away these stains also in the blood of the Lamb (*Revelation* 7:14). Imperfect, or none must be Your service here. O take Your Son's excuse, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (*Matthew* 26:41)

2. THE GREAT PREPARATIVES FOR THE SAINTS' REST

The passage of paradise is not now so blocked up as when the law and curse reigned. Wherefore finding, beloved Christians, a new and living way consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, the flesh of Christ, by which we may with boldness enter into the holiest (*Exodus* 26:3; *2 Chronicles* 3:14; *Hebrews* 6:19), I shall draw near with fuller assurance, and, finding the flaming sword removed (*Genesis* 3:24), shall look again into the paradise of our God. And because I know that this is no forbidden fruit, and furthermore that it is good for food, and pleasant to the spiritual eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one truly wise and happy (*Genesis* 2:16-17; *Revelation* 22:2), I shall, through the assistance of the Spirit, take and eat thereof myself, and give to you, according to my power, that you may eat (*Genesis* 3:6; *Revelation* 2:7). The porch of this temple is exceedingly glorious, and the gate of it is called "Beautiful" (*Acts* 3:2). Here are four things as the four corners of it:–

1. The ***most glorious coming and appearing of the Son of God*** may well be reckoned in his people's glory. For their sake he came into the world, suffered, died, rose, ascended; and for their sake it is that he will return. To this end will Christ come again to receive his people unto himself, that where he is, there they may be also (*John* 14:3). The bridegroom's departure was not consequent upon divorce. He did not leave us with a purpose to return no more. He has left pledges enough to assure us to the contrary. We have his word, his many promises, his ordinances, which show forth his death till he come (*1 Corinthians* 11:26); and his Spirit, to direct, sanctify, and comfort till he return (*John* 16:7). We have frequent tokens of love from him, to show us he forgets not his promise, nor us. We daily behold the forerunners of his coming, foretold by himself. We see the fig-tree puts forth leaves, and therefore know that summer is nigh (*Luke* 21:30). Though the riotous world say, "My Lord delayeth his coming," (*Luke* 12:45) yet let the saints lift up their heads, for their redemption draws nigh (*Luke* 21:28). Alas fellow-Christians, what should we do if our Lord should not return? What a situation are we left in here! What? leave us in the midst of wolves, and among lions, a generation of vipers (*Matthew* 3:7), and here forget us? Did he buy us so dear, and then leave us sinning, suffering, groaning, dying daily – and will he come no more to us? It cannot be. This is like our unkind dealing with Christ, who, when we feel ourselves warm in the world, care not for coming to him; but this is not like Christ's dealing with us. He that would come to suffer, will surely come to triumph. He that would come to purchase, will surely come to possess. Where else were all our hopes? What were become of our faith, our prayers, our tears and our waiting? What were all the patience of the saints worth to them? Were we not left of all men the most

miserable (*1 Corinthians* 15:19)? Christians, has Christ made us forsake all the world, and to be forsaken of all the world? – to hate all, and be hated of all? And all this for him, that we might have him instead of all? And will he, do you think, after all this, forget us and forsake us himself? Far be such a thought from our hearts! But why did he not stay with his people while he was here? Why? Was not the work on earth done? Must he not take possession of glory on our behalf? Must he not intercede with the Father, plead his sufferings, be filled with the Spirit to send forth, receive authority, and subdue his enemies? Our abode here is short. If he had stayed on earth, what would it have been to enjoy him for a few days and then die? He has more in heaven to dwell among; even the spirits of many generations. He will have us live by faith, and not by sight (*2 Corinthians* 5:7). O fellow-Christians, what a day will that be, when we, who have been kept prisoners by sin, by sinners, by the grave, shall be brought out by the Lord himself! It will not be such a coming as his first was, in poverty and contempt, to be spat upon, and buffeted, and crucified again (*Matthew* 27:27-38). He will not come – O callous world! – to be slighted and neglected by you any more. Yet that coming was not without its glory. If the heavenly host, for the celebration of his nativity, had to praise God (*Luke* 2:13), with what acclamations will angels and saints at that day proclaim glory to God, peace and good-will toward men! If a star must lead men from remote parts, to come to worship the child in the manger (*Matthew* 2:2, 9-10), how will the glory of his next appearing constrain all the world to acknowledge his sovereignty! If, riding on an ass, he entered Jerusalem with hosannas (*Matthew* 21:7-9), with what peace and glory will he come toward the New Jerusalem! If, when he was in the form of a servant, they cried out, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (*Mark* 4:41) what will they say when they shall see him coming in his glory, and the heavens and the earth obey him? "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn." (*Matthew* 24:30) To think and speak of that day with horror well becomes the impenitent sinner, but ill the believing saint. Shall the wicked behold him, and cry, "Yonder is he whose blood we neglected, whose grace we resisted, whose counsel we refused, whose government we cast off!" and shall not the saints, with inconceivable gladness, cry, "Yonder is he whose blood redeemed us, whose Spirit cleansed us, whose law governed us; in whom we trusted, and he has not deceived our trust for whom we long waited. And now we see we have not waited in vain! O cursed corruption! that would have had us turn to the world and present things, and say, "Why should we wait for the Lord any longer?" – Now we see, blessed are all they that wait for him. (*Daniel* 12:12) And now, Christians, should we not put up that petition heartily, "Thy kingdom come?" *(Matthew* 6:10) "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' and let him that heareth," (and reads), "say, 'Come!'" (*Revelation* 22:17) Our Lord himself says, "Surely I come quickly." Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus! (*Revelation* 22:20)

2. Another thing that leads to paradise is that great work of Jesus Christ, ***in raising the body from the dust and uniting it again unto the soul.*** A wonderful effect of infinite power and love! "Yes, wonderful indeed," says Unbelief, "if it be true. What, shall all these scattered bones and dust become a man?" – Let me with reverence plead for God, for that power whereby I hope to rise. What sustains the massy body of the earth? What limits the vast ocean of the waters? Whence is that constant ebbing and flowing of the tides? How many times larger than all the earth is the sun, that glorious body of light? Is it not as easy to raise the dead as to make heaven and earth, and all out of nothing? – Look not on the dead bones, and dust, and difficulty, but at the promise. Contentedly commit these bodies to a prison that shall not long contain them. Let us lie down in peace and take our rest; it will not be an everlasting night, nor endless sleep. If unclothing be the thing that you fear, it is that you may have better clothing. If to be turned out of doors be the thing you fear, remember that when "the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, thou hast a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (*2 Corinthians* 5:1) Lay down cheerfully this lump of corruption; you shall undoubtedly receive it again in incorruption. Lay down freely this terrestrial, this natural body; you shall receive it again a celestial, a spiritual body. Though you lay it down with great dishonour, you shall receive it in glory. Though you are separated from it through weakness, it shall be raised again in mighty power; "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (*1 Corinthians* 15:52) "The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then they who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (*1 Thessalonians* 4:17) Triumph now, O Christian, in these promises; you shall shortly triumph in their performance. This is the day which the Lord will make; we shall rejoice and be glad in it. (*Psalm* 118:24) The grave that could not keep our Lord, cannot keep us. He rose for us, and by the same power will cause us to rise. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Let us never look at the grave, but let us see the resurrection beyond it. Yes indeed, let us be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord." (*1 Corinthians* 15:58)

3. Part of this prologue to the saints' rest is ***the public and solemn process at their judgment***, where they shall first themselves be acquitted and justified, and then with Christ judge the world. Young and old, of all estates and nations, that ever existed from the creation to that day, must here come and receive their doom. O terrible, O joyful day! Terrible to

those that have forgotten the coming of their Lord, joyful to the saints, whose waiting and hope was to see this day! Then shall the world behold the goodness and severity of God: on them who perish, severity. but to His chosen, goodness. Every one must give an account of his stewardship. Every talent of time, health, abilities, mercies, afflictions, means, warnings, must be reckoned-for. (*Matthew* 25:14-30) The sins of youth, those which they had forgotten, and their secret sins, shall all be laid open before angels and men. They shall see the Lord Jesus, whom they neglected, whose word they disobeyed, whose ministers they abused, whose servants they hated, now sitting to judge them. Their own consciences shall cry out against them, and call to their remembrance all their misdoings. Which way will the wretched sinner look? Who can conceive the terrible thoughts of his heart? Now the world cannot help him; his old companions cannot; the saints neither can nor will. Only the Lord Jesus can; but there is the misery – he will not. Time was, sinner, when Christ would, and you would not; now, fain would you, and he will not. All in vain is it to "cry to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne;'" (*Revelation* 6:16) for you have the Lord of mountains and rocks for your enemy, Whose voice they will obey, and not yours. I charge you, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom, that you set yourself seriously to ponder these things.

But why do you tremble, O humble, gracious soul? He that would not lose one Noah in a universal deluge (*Genesis* 7), nor overlook one Lot in Sodom (*Genesis* 19); nay, that could do nothing till Lot went forth; will He forget you at that day? "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment, to be punished." (*2 Peter* 2:9) He knows how to make the same day the greatest terror to His foes, and yet the greatest joy to His people. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (*Romans* 8:1). Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" Shall the law? "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death." (*Romans* 8:2) Or shall conscience? "The Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God." (*Romans* 8:16) "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" (*Romans* 8:33-34) If our judge condemn us not, who shall? He that said to the adulterous woman, "Hath no man condemned thee? neither do I" (*John* 8:10-11), will say to us, more faithfully than Peter to him, "Though all men deny thee, or condemn thee, I will not." (*Mark* 14:29) Having confessed me before men, you "will I also confess before my Father Who is in heaven." (*Mark* 10:32)

What inexpressible joy that our dear Lord, who loves our souls and whom our souls love, shall be our Judge! Will a man fear to be judged by his dearest friend? or a wife by her own husband? Christian, did Christ come down and suffer, and weep, and bleed, and die for you, and will he now condemn you? Was he judged, condemned, and executed in your stead, and now will he himself condemn you? Has he done most of the work already, in redeeming, regenerating, sanctifying and preserving you, and will he now undo all again? Well then, let the terror of that day be never so great, surely our Lord can finally mean no ill to us. Let it make the devils tremble, and the wicked tremble, but it shall make us leap for joy. It must affect us deeply with the sense of our mercy and happiness, to see most of the world tremble with terror, while we triumph with joy; to hear them doomed to everlasting flames, when we are proclaimed heirs of the kingdom; to see our neighbours, that lived in the same town, came to the same congregation, dwelt in the same houses, and were esteemed more honourable in the world than ourselves, now, by The Searcher of Hearts, eternally separated. This, with the great magnificence and dreadfulness of the day, the apostle forcefully expresses: "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day." (*2 Thessalonians* 1:6-10)

Yet more: we shall be so far from the dread of that judgment, that we ourselves shall become the judges. Christ will take his people, as it were, into commission with himself, and they shall sit and approve his righteous judgment. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" Nay, "know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (*1 Corinthians* 6:3) Were it not for the word of Christ that speaks it, this advancement would seem incredible, and the language arrogant. Even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied this, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (*Jude* 14-15) Thus shall the saints be honoured, and "the upright shall have dominion in the morning." (*Psalm* 40:14) O that the careless world were wise, that they understood this – that they would consider their latter end! (*Proverbs* 19:20) – that they would be now of the same mind as they will be when they shall see the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are in it

burnt up! (*2 Peter* 3:10) – when all shall be on fire about them, and all earthly glory consumed. For “the heavens and the earth which are now, are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men.” (*2 Peter* 3:7) “Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (*2 Peter* 3:11-12)

4. The last preparative for the saints' rest is ***their solemn coronation and receiving the kingdom***. For as Christ, their head, is anointed both King and Priest, so under him are his people made unto God both kings and priests (*Revelation* 1:6, 5:10), to reign, and to offer praises for ever. The crown of righteousness, which was laid up for them, shall by the Lord, the righteous Judge, be given them at that day. They have been faithful unto death, and therefore he will give them a crown of life (*James* 1:12; *Revelation* 2:10). And according to the improvement of their talents here (*Matthew* 25:21), so shall their rule and dignity be enlarged. They are not dignified with empty titles, but real dominion. Christ will grant them to sit with him on his throne (*Revelation* 3:21), and will give them power over the nations, even as he received of his Father; and he "will give them the morning star." (*Revelation* 2:28) The Lord himself will give them possession, with these applauding expressions: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (*Matthew* 25:21)

And with this solemn and blessed proclamation shall he enthrone them: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (*Matthew* 25:34) Every word is full of life and joy . . . . . .

"Come” – this is the holding forth of the golden sceptre (*Esther* 4:11), to warrant our approach unto this glory. Come now as near as you will; fear not the Bethshemites' judgment (*1 Samuel* 6:19); for the enmity is utterly abolished. This is not such a "Come" as we were used-to hear, "Come, take up your cross and follow me." (*Matthew* 10:38) Though that was sweet, yet this is much more.

"Ye blessed” – blessed indeed, when that mouth so pronounces us! For though the world has accounted us accursed, and we have been ready to account ourselves so, yet, certainly, those whom he blesses are blessed; and those only whom he curses are cursed; and his blessing cannot be reversed.

"Of my Father" – blessed in the Father's love, as well as the Son's; for They are one. The Father has testified His love in their election, donation to Christ, and in the sending of Christ, and accepting his ransom, as the Son has also testified his.

"Inherit" – no longer bondsmen, nor servants only, nor children under age, who differ not in possession, but only in title, from servants; but now we are heirs of the kingdom, and joint-heirs with Christ. (*Romans* 8:17)

"The kingdom" – no less than the kingdom! Indeed, to be King of kings and Lord of lords is our Lord's own proper title, but to be kings, and reign with him, is ours (*Revelation* 1:6, 5:10). The enjoyment of this kingdom is as the light of the sun (*Revelation* 22:5); each has the whole, and the rest none the less.

"Prepared for you" – God is the Alpha as well as the Omega (*Revelation* 1:8) of our blessedness. Eternal Love has laid the foundation. He prepared the kingdom for us, and then prepared us for the kingdom. This is the preparation of His counsel and decree, for the execution whereof Christ was yet to make a further preparation.

"For you" – not for believers only, in general, who, without individual persons, are nobody; but for you personally.

"From the foundation of the world" – not only from the promise after Adam's fall (*Genesis* 3:15), but from eternity.

Thus we have seen the Christian safely landed in paradise, and conveyed honourably to his rest. Now let us a little further, in the next chapter, view those mansions, consider their privileges, and see whether there be any glory like unto this glory.

3. THE EXCELLENCIES OF THE SAINTS' REST

Let us draw a little nearer, and see what further excellencies this rest affords. The Lord hide us in the clefts of the rock, and cover us with the hands of indulgent grace (*Exodus* 33:22), while we approach to take this view!

1. It is a most singular honour of the saints' rest, to be called ***the purchased possession***; that is, the fruit of the blood of the Son of God – indeed, the chief fruit, the end and perfection of all the fruits and efficacy of that blood. Greater love than this there is not, to lay down the life of the lover (*John* 15:13). And to have this our Redeemer ever before our eyes, and the liveliest sense and freshest remembrance of that dying, bleeding love, still upon our souls! How will it fill our souls with perpetual joy, to think that in the streams of this blood we have swum through the violence of the world, the snares of Satan, the seductions of flesh, the curse of the law, the wrath of an offended God, the accusations of a guilty conscience, and the vexing doubts and fears of an unbelieving heart, and have arrived safely into the presence of God! Now He cries to us, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow!" (*Lamentations* 1:12) And we scarce regard the mournful voice – scarce turn aside to view the wounds. But then our perfected souls will feel, and flame in love for love. With what astonishing apprehensions will redeemed saints everlastingly behold their blessed Redeemer – the purchaser and the price, together with the possession! Neither will the view of his wounds of love renew our wounds of sorrow. He, whose first words after his resurrection were to a great sinner, "Woman, why weepest thou?" (*John* 20:15) knows how to raise love and joy, without any cloud of sorrow or storm of tears. If any thing we enjoy was purchased with the life of our dearest friend, how highly should we value it! If a dying friend were to deliver us but a token of his love, how carefully would we preserve it, and still remember him when we were to behold it, as if his own name were written on it! And will not, then, the death and blood of our Lord everlastingly sweeten our possessed glory? As we write down the price our goods cost us, so on our righteousness and glory write down the price: the precious blood of Christ (*Ephesians* 1:7; *Colossians* 1:12). His sufferings were to satisfy the justice that required blood, and to bear what was due to sinners, and so to restore them to the life they lost, and the happiness from which they fell. The work of Christ's redemption so well pleased the Father that He gave him power to advance his chosen, and give them the glory which was given to himself; and all this "according to his good pleasure and the counsel of His own will." (*Ephesians* 1:5,11)

2. Another pearl in the saints' diadem is that it is ***a free gift***. These two, "purchased" and "free," are the chains of gold which make up the wreaths for the tops of the pillars in the temple of God (*2 Chronicles* 3:16). It was dear to Christ, but free to us. When Christ was to buy, silver and gold were nothing worth; prayers and tears could not suffice, nor any thing below his blood; but our buying is receiving; we have it freely, without money and without price. A thankful acceptance of a free release is no paying of the debt. Here is all free; if the Father freely give the Son, and the Son freely pay the debt; and if God freely accept that way of payment, when He might have required it of the principal; and if both Father and Son freely offer us the purchased life on our cordial acceptance; and if They freely send the Spirit to enable us to accept; what is here, then, that is not free? O the everlasting admiration that must surprise the saints to think of this freeness! "What did the Lord see in me, that He should judge me meet for such a state? That I, who was but a poor, diseased, despised wretch, should be clad in the brightness of this glory! That I, a creeping worm, should be advanced to this high dignity! That I, who was but lately groaning, weeping, dying, should now be as full of joy as my heart can hold! – yes, should be taken from the grave where I was decaying, and from the dust and darkness where I seemed forgotten, and be here set before His throne! That I should be taken, with Mordecai (*Esther* 8:2), from captivity, and be set next unto the king; and with Daniel from the den, to be made ruler of princes and provinces (*Daniel* 6:3,23)! Who can fathom immeasurable love?" If worthiness were our condition for admission, we might sit down and weep, with St. John, because no man was found worthy (*Revelation* 5:4). But "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (*Revelation* 5:5) is worthy, and has prevailed; and by that title we must hold the inheritance. We shall offer there the offering that David refused (*2 Samuel* 23:16-17) – even praise for that which cost us nothing. Here our commission runs, "Freely ye have received, freely give;" (*Matthew* 10:8) but Christ has dearly bought, yet freely gives.

If it were only for nothing, and without our merit, the wonder would be great; but it is moreover against our merit, and against our long endeavouring our own ruin. What an astonishing thought it will be, to think of the immeasurable difference between our deserts and receipts! – between the state we should have been in, and the state we are in! – to look down upon hell, and see the vast difference that grace has made between us and them! To see the inheritance there, to which we were born, so different from that to which we are adopted! What pangs of love will it cause within us to think, "Yonder was the place that sin would have brought me to; but this is it that Christ has brought me to! Yonder death was the wages of my sin (*Romans* 6:23), but this eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Who made me to differ? Had I not now been in those flames if I had had my own way, and been let alone to

my own will? Should I not have lingered in Sodom (*Genesis* 19:24) till the flames had seized on me, if God had not in mercy brought me out?" Doubtless this will be our everlasting reason to wonder, that so rich a crown should fit the head of so vile a sinner; that such high advancement, and such long unfruitfulness and unkindness, can be the state of the same person, and that such vile rebellions can conclude in such most precious joys! But no thanks to us, nor to any of our duties and labours, much less to our neglects and laziness: we know to Whom the praise is due, and must be given for ever. Indeed, to this very end it was that infinite wisdom cast the whole design of man's salvation into this mould of purchases and freeness, that the love and joy of man might be perfected, and the honour of grace most highly advanced; that the thought of merit might neither cloud the one nor obstruct the other; and that on these two hinges the gate of heaven might turn. So then let DESERVED be written on the door of hell; but on the door of heaven and life, THE FREE GIFT.

3. This rest is ***peculiar to saints***: it belongs to no other of all the sons of men. If all Egypt had been light, the Israelites would not have had the less; but to enjoy that light alone, while their neighbours lived in thick darkness, must make them more aware of their privilege (*Exodus* 10:22-23). *Distinguishing* mercy affects more than *any* mercy. If Pharaoh had passed as safely as Israel, the Red Sea would have been less remembered (*Exodus* 14:28-29). If the rest of the world had not been drowned (*Genesis* 7:20-22), and the rest of Sodom and Gomorrah not burned (*Genesis* 19:24-25), the saving of Noah would have been no wonder, nor Lot's deliverance so much talked-of. When one is enlightened, and another left in darkness; one reformed, and another by his lust enslaved; it makes the saints cry out, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself unto us, and not unto the world?" When the prophet is sent to one widow only of all that were in Israel (*1 Kings* 17:8-9; *Luke* 4:26), and to cleanse one Naaman of all the lepers (*2 Kings* 5:9-10,14), the mercy is more observable. That will surely be a day of passionate awareness on both sides, when there shall be two in one bed, and two in the field, the one taken and the other left (*Luke* 17:34,36). The saints shall look down upon the burning lake (*Revelation* 20:15), and in the sense of their own happiness, and in the approbation of God's just proceedings, they shall rejoice and sing, "Thou art righteous, O Lord! Who wast, art, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus." (*Revelation* 16:5)

4. But though this rest be peculiar to the saints, yet it is ***common to all the saints***; for it is an association of blessed spirits, both saints and angels: a corporation of perfected saints, whereof Christ is the head: the communion of saints completed. As we have been together in the labour,

duty, danger and distress, so shall we be in the great recompense and deliverance. As we have been scorned and despised, so shall we be acknowledged and honoured together. We who have gone through the day of sadness, shall enjoy together that day of gladness (*Numbers* 10:10). Those who have been with us in persecution and in prison, shall be with us also in that place of consolation. How often have our groans made, as it were, one sound, our tears one stream and our desires one prayer! But now all our praises shall make up one melody; all our churches, one Church; and all ourselves, one body; for we shall be all one in Christ, even as he and the Father are one (*John* 17:20-21). It is true, we must be careful not to look for that in the saints which is alone in Christ. But if the forethought of sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, may be our lawful joy (*Matthew* 8:11), how much more the real sight and actual possession! It cannot but be comforting to think of that day, when we shall join with Moses in his song (*Exodus* 15:1), with David in his psalms of praise, and with all the redeemed in the song of the Lamb for ever (*Revelation* 5:9); when we shall see Enoch walking with God (*Genesis* 5:24), Noah enjoying the end of his singularity, Joseph of his integrity, Job of his patience; Hezekiah of his uprightness (*2 Kings* 18:1,3), and all the saints the end of their faith. Not only our old acquaintance, but all the saints of all ages, whose faces in the flesh we never saw, we shall there both know and comfortingly enjoy. Indeed, angels as well as saints will be our blessed acquaintance. Those who now are willingly our ministering spirits, will willingly then be our companions in joy. They who had such joy in heaven for our conversion (*Luke* 15:7), will gladly rejoice with us in our glorification. Then we shall truly say, as David, “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee;” (*Psalm* 119:63) when "we are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." (*Hebrews* 12:22-24) It is a singular excellence of heavenly rest, that we are "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (*Ephesians* 2:19)

5. As another property of our rest, ***we shall derive its joys immediately from God***. Now we have nothing at all immediately, but at the second or third hand – or how many, who knows? – from the earth, from man, from sun and moon, from the ministration of angels, and from the Spirit, and Christ. Though, in the hand of angels, the stream savours not of the imperfection of sinners, yet it does of the imperfection of creatures; and as it comes from man, it savours of both. How quick and piercing is the word in itself (*Hebrews* 4:12)! Yet many times it never enters, being

managed by a feeble arm. What weight and worth is there in every passage of the blessed Gospel! Enough, one would think, to enter and pierce the dullest soul, and wholly possess its thoughts and affections, and yet how often does it fall as water upon a stone! The things of God which we handle, are divine; but our manner of handling is human. There is little we touch, but we leave the print of our fingers behind. If God speaks the word Himself, it will be a piercing, melting word indeed (*Hebrews* 4:12; *Joshua* 2:11). The Christian now knows, by experience, that his most immediate joys are his sweetest joys, which have least of man, and are most directly from the Spirit. Christians who are much in secret prayer and contemplation, are men of greatest life and joy because they have all more immediately from God Himself. Not that we should cast off hearing, reading, and conferring, or neglect any ordinance of God; but to live above them while we use them is the way of a Christian. There is joy in these remote receipts; but the fullness of joy is in God's immediate presence. We shall then have light without a candle, and perpetual day without the sun, for "the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof; there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; and they shall reign for ever and ever." (*Revelation* 21:23; 22:5) We shall then have enlightened understandings without Scripture, and be governed without a written law, for the Lord will perfect his law in our hearts (*2 Corinthians* 3:3), and we shall be all perfectly taught of God (*John* 6:45). We shall have joy, which we drew not from the promises, nor fetched home by faith or hope. We shall have communion without ordinances, without this fruit of the vine, when Christ shall drink it new with us in his Father's kingdom (*Matthew* 26:29), and refresh us with the comforting wine of immediate enjoyment. To have necessities, but no supply, is the state of them in hell. To have necessity supplied by means of creatures, is the state of us on earth. To have necessity supplied immediately from God, is the state of the saints in heaven. To have no necessity at all is the prerogative of God Himself.

6. A further excellence of this rest is, that it will be ***seasonable***. He that expects the fruit of his vineyard at the season, and makes His people "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His season," (*Psalm* 1:3) will also give them the crown in His season. He that will have a word of joy spoken in season to him that is weary (*Proverbs* 15:23), will surely cause the time of joy to appear in the fittest season. They who are not weary in well-doing, shall, if they faint not, reap in due season. If God gives rain even to His enemies (*Matthew* 5:45), both the former and the latter in its season, and reserves the appointed weeks of harvest, and covenants that there shall be day and night in their season (*Genesis* 8:22), then surely the glorious harvest of the saints shall not miss

its season. Doubtless, He who would not stay a day longer than His promise, but brought Israel out of Egypt on the self-same day when the four hundred and thirty years expired (*Genesis* 15:13; *Exodus* 12:40), neither will He fail of one day or hour of the fittest season for His people's glory. When we have had in this world a long night of darkness, will not the day-breaking and the rising of the Sun of Righteousness (*Malachi* 4:2) be then seasonable? When we have passed a long and tedious journey through no small dangers, is not home then seasonable? When we have had a long and perilous war, and received many a wound, would not a peace, with victory, be seasonable? Men live in a continual weariness, especially the saints, who are most weary of that which the world cannot feel: some weary of a blind mind, some of a hard heart, some of their daily doubts and fears, some of the want of spiritual joys, and some of the sense of God's wrath. And when a poor Christian has desired, and prayed, and waited for deliverance many years, is it not then seasonable? We lament that we do not find a Canaan in the wilderness, or the songs of Zion in a strange land (*Psalm* 137:3-4); that we have not a harbour in the main ocean, nor our rest in the heat of the day, nor heaven before we leave the earth; and would not all this be very unseasonable?

7. As this rest will be seasonable, so it will be ***suitable***. The new nature of the saints suits their spirits to this rest. Indeed, their holiness is nothing else but a spark taken from this element, and by the Spirit of Christ kindled in their hearts, the flame whereof, mindful of its own divine original, ever tends to the place from whence it comes. Temporal crowns and kingdoms could not make a rest for saints. As they were not redeemed with so low a price, neither are they endued with so low a nature. As God will have from them a spiritual worship, suited to His own spiritual being, He will provide them a spiritual rest, suitable to their spiritual nature. The knowledge of God and His Christ, a delightful complacency in that mutual love, an everlasting rejoicing in the enjoyment of our God, with a perpetual singing of His high praises – this is heaven for a saint. Then we shall live in our own element. We are now as the fish in a vessel of water, only so much as will keep them alive; but what is that to the ocean? We have a little air let in to us, to afford us breathing; but what is that to the sweet and fresh gales upon mount Zion? We have a beam of the sun to lighten our darkness, and a warm ray to keep us from freezing, but then we shall live in its light, and be revived by its heat for ever. – As the natures of saints are, such are their desires, and it is the desires of our renewed nature to which this rest is suited. Whilst our desires remain corrupted and misguided, it is a far greater mercy to deny them – indeed, to destroy them – than to satisfy them; but those which are spiritual are of His own planting, and He will surely water them, and give the increase. He brought to life our hunger and thirst for

righteousness (*Matthew* 5:6), that He might make us happy in a full satisfaction. Christian, this is a rest after your own heart; it contains all that your heart can wish; that which you longed, prayed, laboured for, there you shall find it all. You would have rather had God in Christ, than all the world; there you shall have him. What would you not give for assurance of his love? There you shall have assurance without suspicion. Desire what you can, and ask what you will, as a Christian, and it shall be given you, not only to half of the kingdom (*Esther* 5:3,6;7:2; *Mark* 6:23), but to the enjoyment both of kingdom and King. This is a life of desire and prayer, but that is a life of satisfaction and enjoyment. This rest is very suitable to the saints' necessities also, as well as to their natures and desires. It contains whatsoever they truly wanted; not supplying them with gross, created comforts, which, like Saul's armour on David, are more burden than benefit (*1 Samuel* 17:38-39). It was Christ and perfect holiness which they most needed, and with these shall they be supplied.

8. Still more, this rest will be ***absolutely perfect***. We shall then have joy without sorrow, and rest without weariness. There is no mixture of corruption with our graces, nor of suffering with our comfort. There are none of those waves in that harbour, which now so toss us up and down. Today we are well, tomorrow sick; today in esteem, tomorrow in disgrace; today we have friends, tomorrow none; nay, we have wine and vinegar in the same cup. If revelations raise us to the third heaven (*2 Corinthians* 12:2), the messenger of Satan must presently buffet us, and the thorn in the flesh fetch us down (*2 Corinthians* 12:7). But there is none of this inconstancy in heaven. If perfect love casts out fear (*1 John* 4:18), then perfect joy must cast out sorrow, and perfect happiness exclude all the remnants of misery. We shall there rest from all the evil of sin and of suffering.

Heaven excludes nothing more directly than sin, whether of nature or of conversation. "There shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." (*Revelation* 21:27) What need did Christ have at all to have died, if heaven could have contained imperfect souls? "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (*1 John* 3:8) His blood and Spirit have not done all this, to leave us, after all, defiled. "What communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (*2 Corinthians* 6:14-15) Christian, if you be once in heaven, you shall sin no more. Is not this glad news to you, who has prayed and watched against it so long? I know, if it were offered to your choice, you would rather choose to be freed from sin, than have all the world. You shall have your desire. That hard heart, those vile thoughts which accompanied you to every duty, shall be left behind for ever. Your

understanding shall never more be troubled with darkness. All dark Scriptures shall be made plain; all seeming contradictions reconciled. The poorest Christian is currently there a more perfect divine than any here. O that happy day, when error shall vanish for ever! – when our understanding shall be filled with God Himself, Whose light will leave no darkness in us! His face shall be the Scripture where we shall read the truth. Many a godly man here, in his mistaken zeal, has been the means of deceiving and perverting his brethren, and, when he sees his own error, cannot tell how to undeceive them. But there we shall join in one truth, as being one in Him who is the truth. We shall also rest from all the sin of our will, affections, and conversation. We shall no more retain this rebelling principle, which is still drawing us from God; no more be oppressed with the power of our corruptions, nor vexed with their presence: no pride, passion, slothfulness, insensibility, shall enter with us; no strangeness to God, and the things of God; no coldness of affections, nor imperfection in our love; no inconstant walking, nor grieving of the Spirit (*Ephesians* 4:30); no scandalous action, nor unholy conversation: we shall rest from all these for ever. Then shall our will correspond to the divine will, as face answers face in a glass, and from which, as our law and rule, we shall never swerve. "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His." (*Hebrews* 4:10)

Our sufferings were but the consequences of our sinning, and in heaven they both shall cease together . . . . . .

– We shall rest from all our doubts of God's love. It shall no more be said that "doubts are like the thistle, a bad weed, but growing in good ground." They shall now be weeded out, and trouble the gracious soul no more. We shall hear that kind of language no more, "What shall I do to know my state? How shall I know that God is my Father, that my heart is upright, that my conversion is true, that faith is sincere? I am afraid my sins are unpardoned, that all I do is hypocrisy, that God will reject me, that He does not hear my prayers." All this is there turned into praise.

– We shall rest from all sense of God's displeasure. Hell shall not be mixed with heaven. At times the gracious soul remembered God, and was troubled; complained, and was overwhelmed, and refused to be comforted; divine wrath lay hard upon him, and God afflicted him with all His waves. But that blessed day shall convince us, that though God hid His face from us for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness He will have mercy on us.

– We shall rest from all the temptations of Satan. What a grief is it to a Christian, though he yield not to the temptation, yet to be solicited to deny his Lord! What a torment to have such horrid suggestions made to his

soul! Such blasphemous ideas presented to his imagination! Sometimes cruel thoughts of God, undervaluing thoughts of Christ, unbelieving thoughts of Scripture, or injurious thoughts of Providence! To be tempted sometimes to turn to present things, to play with the baits of sin, and venture on the delights of flesh, and sometimes on atheism itself! – especially when we know the treachery of our own hearts, ready as tinder to take fire as soon as one of those sparks shall fall upon them! Satan has power here to tempt us in the wilderness (*Matthew* 4:1), but he enters not the holy city; he may set us on a pinnacle of the temple in the earthly Jerusalem (*Matthew* 4:5), but the New Jerusalem he may not approach; he may take us up into an exceeding high mountain (*Matthew* 4:8), but the mount Zion he cannot ascend; and if he could, all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them (*Matthew* 4:8), would be a despised bait to the soul possessed of the kingdom of our Lord. No, it is in vain for Satan to offer a temptation more. All our temptations from the world and the flesh shall also cease. Oh the hourly dangers that we here walk in! Every sense and member is a snare; every creature, every mercy, and every duty is a snare to us. We can scarce open our eyes but we are in danger of envying those above us, or despising those below us; of coveting the honours and riches of some, or beholding the rags and beggary of others with pride and mercilessness. If we see beauty, it is a bait to lust; if deformity, to loathing and disdain. How soon do slanderous reports, vain jests, wanton speeches, creep into the heart! How constant and strong a watch does our appetite require! Have we comeliness and beauty? What fuel for pride! Are we deformed? What an occasion of repining! Have we strength of reason and gifts of learning? O how prone to be puffed up, hunt after applause, and despise our brethren! Are we unlearned? How apt then to despise what we have not! Are we in places of authority? How strong is the temptation to abuse our trust, make our will our law, and mould all the enjoyments of others by the rules and model of our own interest and policy! Are we inferiors? How prone to envy others' pre-eminence, and bring their actions to the bar of our judgment! Are we rich, and not too much exalted? Are we poor and not discontented? Are we not lazy in our duties, or make a Christ of them? Not that God has made these things our snares, but through our own corruption they become so to us. Our selves are the greatest snares to ourselves. This is our comfort: our rest will free us from all these. As Satan has no entrance there, so he has nothing to serve his malice; but all things there shall join with us in the high praises of our great Deliverer.

– As we rest from the temptations, so shall we rest from the abuses and persecutions of the world. The prayers of the souls under the altar (*Revelation* 6:9-10) will then be answered, and God will avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth. This is the time for crowning with thorns (*Matthew* 27:29), that, for crowning with glory. Now, "all that will

live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" (*2 Timothy* 3:12) then, they that suffered with him shall be glorified with him. Now, we must be hated of all men for Christ's sake, then, Christ will be admired in his saints that were thus hated. We are here made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men: as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things. Men separate us from their company, and reproach us, and cast out our names as evil; but we shall then be as much gazed at for our glory, and they will be shut out of the Church of the saints, and separated from us, whether they will it or not. We can now scarce pray in our families, or sing praises to God, but our voice is a vexation to them: how must it torment them, then, to see us praising and rejoicing while they are howling and lamenting! You, brethren, who can now attempt no work of God without losing the love of the world, consider, you shall have none in heaven but will further your work, and join heart and voice with you in your everlasting joy and praise. Till then, possess your souls in patience. Bind all reproaches as a crown to your heads. Esteem them greater riches than the world's treasures. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with Christ." (*2 Thessalonians* 1:6-7)

– We shall then rest from all our sad divisions and un-Christian quarrels with one another. How lovingly do thousands live together in heaven, who lived at variance upon earth! There is no contention, because none of this pride, ignorance, or other corruption. There is no plotting to strengthen our party, nor deep designing against our brethren. If there be sorrow or shame in heaven, we shall then be both sorry and ashamed to remember all this conduct on earth; as Joseph's brethren were to behold him, when they remembered their former unkind usage (*Genesis* 45:3). Is it not enough that all the world is against us, but we must also be against one another? O happy days of persecution, which drove us together in love, but now by whom the sunshine of liberty and prosperity crumbles into dust through our contentions! O happy day of the saints' rest in glory, when, as there is one God, one Christ, one Spirit, so we shall have one heart, one Church, one employment for ever.

– We shall then rest from our participation in our brethren's sufferings. The Church on earth is a mere hospital! Some groaning under a dark understanding, some under an insensitive heart, some anguishing under unfruitful weakness, and some bleeding for miscarriages and wilfulness; some crying out of their poverty, some groaning under pains and infirmities, and some bewailing a whole catalogue of calamities. But a far greater grief it is, to see our dearest and most intimate friends turned aside from the truth of Christ, continuing their neglect of Christ and their souls, and nothing will awaken them out of their security: to look on an ungodly father or mother, brother or sister, wife or husband, child or

friend, and think how certainly they shall be in hell for ever, if they die in their present un-regenerated state; to think of the Gospel departing, the glory taken from our Israel, poor souls left willingly dark and destitute, and blowing out the light that should guide them to salvation! Our day of rest will free us from all this, and the days of mourning shall be ended. Then Your people, O Lord, shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of Your planting, the work of Your hands, that You may be glorified (*Isaiah* 60:21).

– Then we shall rest from all our own personal sufferings. This may seem a small thing to those that live in ease and prosperity; but to the daily afflicted soul it makes the thoughts of heaven delightful. O the dying life we now live – as full of sufferings as of days and hours! Our Redeemer leaves this measure of misery upon us, to make us know for what we are beholden, to remind us of what we should otherwise forget, to be serviceable to his wise and gracious designs, and advantageous to our full and final recovery. Grief enters at every sense, seizes every part and power of flesh and spirit. What noble part is there that suffers its pain or ruin alone? But sin and flesh, dust and pain, will all be left behind together. O the blessed tranquillity of that region, where there is nothing but sweet continued peace! O healthful place, where none are sick! O fortunate land, where all are kings! O holy assembly, where all are priests (*Exodus* 19:6)! How free a state, where none are servants but to their supreme monarch! The poor man shall no more be tired with his labours: no more suffer hunger or thirst, cold or nakedness, pinching frosts or scorching heats. Our faces shall no more be pale or sad; no more breaches in friendship, nor parting of friends asunder; no more trouble accompanying our relationships, nor voice of lamentation heard in our dwellings: God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes (*Revelation* 21:4). O my soul, bear with the infirmities of your earthly tabernacle; it will be like this but a little while; the sound of your redeemer's feet is even at the door (*Isaiah* 59:20; *Mark* 13:29; *James* 5:9).

– We shall also rest from all the toils of duties. The conscientious magistrate, parent and minister cries out, "O the burden that lies upon me!" Every relationship, state, age has variety of duties; so that every conscientious Christian cries out, "O the burden! O my weakness, that makes it burdensome!" But our remaining rest will ease us of the burdens.

– Once more, we shall rest from all these troublesome afflictions which necessarily accompany our absence from God. The trouble that is mixed in our desires and hopes, our longings and waitings, shall then cease. We shall no more look into our cabinet and miss our treasure; into our hearts, and miss our Christ; no more seek him from ordinance to ordinance; but all be concluded in a most blessed and full enjoyment.

9. The last jewel of our crown is, that it will be an ***everlasting rest***. Without this all were comparatively nothing. The very thought of leaving it would embitter all our joys. It would be a hell in heaven, to think of once losing heaven; as it would be a kind of heaven to the damned, had they but hope of once escaping. Mortality is the disgrace of all delights under the sun. How it spoils our pleasure to see it dying in our hands! But, O blessed eternity, where our lives are perplexed with no such thoughts, nor our joys interrupted with any such fears! – where "we shall be pillars in the temple of God, and go no more out." (*Revelation* 3:12) While we were servants, we held by lease, and that but for the term of a transitory life; "but the son abideth in the house for ever." (*John* 8:35) O my soul, let go of your dreams of immediate pleasure, and loose thy hold of earth and flesh. Study frequently, study thoroughly this one word – eternity. What! – live and never die? – rejoice, and ever rejoice? O happy souls in hell, should you but escape after millions of ages! O miserable saints in heaven, should you be dispossessed after the age of a million of worlds! This word, "everlasting", contains the perfection of their torment and our glory. O that the sinner would study this word; methinks it would startle him out of his dead sleep! O that the gracious soul would study it; methinks it would revive him in his deepest agony! And must I, Lord, thus live for ever? – Then will I also love for ever. Must my joys be immortal; and shall not my thanks be also immortal? Surely, if I shall never lose my glory, I will never cease Your praises. If You will both perfect and perpetuate me and my glory, as I shall be Yours, and not my own, so shall my glory be Your glory. And as Your glory was Your ultimate end in my glory, so shall it also be my end, when You have crowned me with that glory which has no end. "Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever.'" (*1 Timothy* 1:17)

The souls of believers do enjoy inconceivable blessedness and glory, even while they remain separated from their bodies. What can be more plain than these words of Paul: "We are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home," or rather sojourning, "in the body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (*2 Corinthians* 5:6-8) Or these: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." (*Philippians* 1:23) If Paul had not expected to enjoy Christ till the resurrection, why should he be in a strait, or desire to depart? Nay, should he not have been loath to depart upon the very same grounds? for while he was in the flesh he enjoyed something of Christ. Plain enough are the words of Christ to the thief: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (*Luke* 23:43) In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, it seems unlikely Christ

would so evidently intimate and suppose the soul's happiness or misery immediately after death, if there were no such matter (*Luke* 16:19-26). Our Lord's argument for the resurrection supposes that, "God being not the God of the dead, but of the living," therefore Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were then living in the soul (*Matthew* 22:32). If the "blessedness of the dead that die in the Lord" (*Revelation* 14:13) were only in resting in the grave, then a beast or a stone were as blessed; nay, it were evidently a curse, and not a blessing. For was not life a great mercy? Was it not a greater mercy to serve God and to do good; to enjoy all the comforts of life, the fellowship of saints, the comfort of ordinances, and much of Christ in all, than to lie rotting in the grave? Therefore some further blessedness is there promised. How else is it said, "We are come to the spirits of just men made perfect?" (*Hebrews* 12:23) Surely, at the resurrection, the body will be made perfect as well as the spirit. The Scriptures tell us, that Enoch (*Genesis* 5:24) and Elijah (*2 Kings* 2:11) are taken up already. And shall we think they possess that glory alone? Did not Peter, James, and John see Moses also with Christ on the mount (*Matthew* 17:3)? Yet the Scripture says that Moses died. And is it likely that Christ deluded their senses in showing them Moses, if he should not partake of that glory till the resurrection? And is not that of Stephen as plain as we can desire? "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (*Acts* 7:59) Surely, if the Lord receive it, it is neither asleep, nor dead, nor annihilated; but it is where he is, and beholds his glory. That of the wise man is of the same import: "The spirit shall return unto God Who gave it." (*Ecclesiastes* 12:7) Why are we said to "have eternal life;" (*John* 3:15) and that to "know God is life eternal;" (*John* 17:3) and that a believer "on the Son hath everlasting life?" (*John* 3:16) Or how is "the kingdom of God within us?" (*Luke* 17:21) If there be as great an interruption of our life as till the resurrection, this is no eternal life, nor "everlasting kingdom." The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are spoken of as "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire!" (*Jude* 7) And if the wicked already suffer eternal fire, then no doubt the godly enjoy eternal blessedness. When John experienced his glorious intercourse, he is said to be "in the Spirit," and to be "carried away in the Spirit." (*Revelation* 1:10) And when Paul was "caught up to the third heaven," he knew not "whether in the body or out of the body." (*2 Corinthians* 12:2) This implies that spirits are capable of these glorious things without the help of their bodies. The same is implied when John says, "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God." (*Revelation* 6:9) When Christ says, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," (*Matthew* 10:28) does it not plainly imply, that when wicked men have killed our bodies, that is, have separated the souls from them, yet the souls are still alive? The soul of Christ was alive when his body was dead, and therefore so shall be ours too. This appears by his words to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise;" (*Luke* 23:43) and also by his voice on the cross, "Father, into

thy hands I commend my Spirit." (*Luke* 23:46) If the spirits of those that "were disobedient in the days of Noah were in prison," (*1 Peter* 3:19-20) that is, in a living and suffering state; then, certainly, the separate spirits of the just are in an opposite condition of happiness. Therefore, faithful souls will no sooner leave their prisons of flesh but angels shall be their conveyance; Christ, and all the perfected spirits of the just, will be their companions; heaven will be their residence, and God their happiness. When such die, they may boldly and believingly say, as Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" (*Acts* 7:59) and commend it, as Christ did, into a Father's hands . . . . . .

Thus I have endeavoured to show you a glimpse of approaching glory. But how short are my expressions of its excellence! Reader, if you be a humble, sincere believer, and wait with longing and labouring for this rest, you will shortly see and feel the truth of all this. You will then have so high an impression of this blessed state as will make you pity the ignorance and distance of mortals, and will tell you all that is here said falls short of the whole truth a thousand-fold. In the meantime, let this much kindle your desires, and bring your endeavours to life. Up and be doing; run, and strive, and fight, and hold on: for you have a certain glorious prize before you (*1 Corinthians* 9:24; *Philippians* 3:14). God will not mock you; do not mock yourself, nor betray your soul by delaying, and all is your own. What kind of men, do you think, would Christians be in their lives and duties, if they had still this glory fresh in their thoughts? What frame would their spirits be in, if their thoughts of heaven were alive and believing? Would their hearts be so heavy, their countenances so sad? or would they have need to take up their comforts from below? Would they be so loath to suffer, so afraid to die? Or would they not think every day a year till they enjoy it? May the Lord heal our carnal hearts, lest we "enter not into this rest because of unbelief." (*Hebrews* 4:6)

4. THE PERSONS FOR WHOM THE SAINTS' REST IS DESIGNED

While I was in the mount, describing the excellences of the saints' rest, I felt it was good being there, and therefore tarried the longer (*Matthew* 17:4). There would not have been such an extreme disproportion between my conceptions and the subject, had I been even longer. Can a prospect of that happy land be tedious? Having read of such high and unutterable glory, a stranger would wonder for what rare creatures this mighty preparation should be made, and expect some illustrious sun should break forth: but, behold! only a shell-full of dust, animated with an invisible rational soul, and that rectified with an unseen restoring power of grace; and this is the creature that must possess such glory! You would think it must needs be some deserving piece, or one that brings a valuable price: but, behold! one that has nothing and can deserve nothing; indeed, that deserves the contrary, and would, if he might, proceed in that deserving; but, being apprehended by love, he is brought to Him that is all, and most affectionately receiving Him, and resting on Him, he, in and through Him, receives all this!

I implore you, reader, as you have the hope of a Christian, or the reason of a man, judge yourself as one that must shortly be judged by a righteous God, and faithfully answer these questions. I will not inquire whether you remember the time or the order of these workings of the Spirit – there may be much uncertainty and mistake in that. If you are sure they are wrought in you, it is not so great a matter that you should know when or how you came by them. But carefully examine and inquire,

Have you been thoroughly convinced of a prevailing depravity through your whole soul? – and a prevailing wickedness through your whole life? – and how vile sin is? – and that by the covenant you have transgressed, the least sin deserves eternal death?

Do you consent to the law, that it is true and righteous, and perceive yourself sentenced to this death by it?

Have you seen the utter insufficiency of every creature, either to be itself your happiness, or the means of removing this your misery?

Have you been convinced that your happiness is only in God, as the end, and in Christ, as the way to Him, and that you must be brought to God through Christ, or perish eternally?

Have you seen an absolute necessity of your rejoicing in Christ, and the full sufficiency in him to do for you whatsoever your case requires?

Have you discovered the excellence of this pearl to be worth your "selling all to buy it?" (*Matthew* 13:45-46)

Have your convictions been like those of a man that thirsts – and not merely a change in opinion, produced by reading or education?

Have both your sin and misery been the abhorrence and burden of your soul? If you could not weep, yet could you heartily groan under the insupportable weight of both? Have you renounced all your own righteousness?

Have you turned your idols out of your heart, so that the creature has no more the sovereignty, but is now a servant to God and Christ?

Do you accept Christ as your only Saviour, and expect your justification, recovery and glory from him alone? Are his laws the most powerful commanders of your life and soul? Do they ordinarily prevail against the commands of the flesh, and against the greatest interest of your credit, profit, pleasure or life?

Has Christ the highest room in your heart and affections, so that, though you can not love him as you would, yet nothing else is loved so much? Have you, to this end, made a hearty covenant with him, and delivered up yourself to him?

Is it your uttermost care and watchful endeavour that you may be found faithful in this covenant and, though you fall into sin, yet would not renounce your bargain, nor change your Lord, nor give up yourself to any other governance, for all the world?

If this be truly your case, you are one of "the people of God" in my text (*Hebrews* 4:9) and as sure as the promise of God is true, this blessed rest remains for you. Only see you "abide in Christ," (*John* 15:4) and "endure to the end;" (*Matthew* 24:13) for "if any man draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in him." (*Hebrews* 10:38) But if no such work be found within you, whatever your deceived heart may think, or how strong so ever your false hopes may be, you will find to your cost, except thorough conversion comes before it, that the rest of the saints belongs not to you. O that you were wise, that you would understand this: that you would consider your latter end! (*Proverbs* 19:20) – that yet, while your soul is in your body, and a price is in your hand, and opportunity and hope before you, your ears may be open, and your heart yield to the persuasions of God, that so you may rest among his people, and enjoy "the inheritance of the saints in light." (*Colossians* 1:12)

"O Thou, the merciful Father of spirits, the attraction of love and ocean of delights, draw up these drossy hearts unto Thyself, and keep them there till they are spiritualized and refined; and second Thy servant's weak endeavours, and persuade those that read these lines, to the practice of this delightful, heavenly work! O suffer not the soul of Thy most unworthy servant to be a stranger to those joys which he describes to others; but keep me, while I remain on earth, in daily breathings after Thee, and in a believing, affectionate walking with Thee! And when Thou comest, let me be found so doing; not serving my flesh, nor asleep, with my lamp unfurnished; but waiting and longing for my Lord's return! Let those who shall read these heavenly directions, not merely read the fruit of my studies, but the breathing of my active hope and love; that if my heart were open to their view, they might there read the same most deeply engraven with a beam from the face of the Son of God; and not find vanity, or lust, or pride within, when the words of life appear without; that so these lines may not witness against me; but proceeding from the heart of the writer, may be effectual, through Thy grace, upon the heart of the reader, and so be the savour of life to both! Amen."

Richard Baxter

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